

*Cycles of History: A Re-interpretation of Sallust's Construction of Early Rome and Roman Decline*

In this paper I propose a reconsideration Sallust's view of the progress of Roman history and its supposed evolution from early utopia to later decline. One school of thought interprets Sallust's historical viewpoint as more optimistic in the *BC* (e.g. Klingner 1928, Oppermann 1958, Schur 1936, Buchner 1960): a Republican system exemplified by *mos maiorum* and *concordia*, where *virtus* was geared toward service of the state, prevailed before 146 B.C.E. (*BC* 7, 9-10; *BJ* 41-2, *Hist.* 1.12M, 1.16M), and then the influx of wealth and *otium* led to moral decline. According to this view, Sallust's pessimism grows in his later works.

Another view holds that Sallust's historical viewpoint does not evolve (Seel 1930, Vretska 1937, 1961). I wish to extend this premise and argue that Sallust's view throughout his corpus is that Romans had *always* been predisposed to *factio* and *ambitio* (*Hist.* fr.1.7M, 1.11M (*iam inde a principio*), *BC* 11.1), and never had any innate *virtus* that set them apart as unique. The latter point is supported by *Hist.* 1.7M, 1.12M, and by a detailed comparison of Sallust's account of early Romans (*BC* 5.9-6) with that of early Africans (*BJ* 17-19), which suggests Sallust wants us to view Roman character as prone to the same faults as others. Moreover, I argue, Sallust thought Romans had always been prone to "cycle" back and forth between *factio* and *concordia* – only achieving the latter when *metus hostilis* (*Hist.* 1.11-12M, *BC* 10, *BJ* 41) existed. Sallust reflects such cycles in *Hist.* 1.11M, 1.12M, and also *BC* 2-13. In fact, his narrative of Roman history and morals in *BC* 2-13 is actually structured to cycle repeatedly from good to bad and back (cf. *BC* 2.6, within *BC* 6, in *BC* 7-10, and *BC* 10.6). That *BC* 2-13 reads according to such cycles hints that even while writing the *BC* Sallust likely had already formulated this more pessimistic view of Roman moral dispositions.

So what do we make of the discrepancy that in *BC* 6-9 early Romans do appear innately virtuous, applying *gloriae cupido* and *ambitio* to the *respublica*? To answer this question, we need not revisit the idea that Sallust's viewpoint evolved from optimism. Two complementary approaches account for this discrepancy of views within the *BC* and bring the *BC* in line with a cyclic/pessimistic reading of Sallust's historical views. First, we can say Rome simply begins at a high-water-mark in the "cycles", the first

downturn from initial *concordia* having yet to occur. Second, although *BC* 6-9 as it stands runs counter to his otherwise pessimistic perspective, I argue Sallust intentionally idealizes and over-schematizes early Rome in *BC* 6-9 to meet an immediate purpose in the prologue – namely, to more clearly section off in *BC* 10 the post-146 B.C.E. Republic as uniquely decadent compared to what preceded it. 146 *was* a momentous year on any account of Roman history, but because of the way Sallust idealizes in *BC* 6-9, 146 becomes *the* turning point when all starts to decline precipitously (*BC* 10, cf. *Hist.* 1.16M).

So what does Sallust gain by temporarily shedding his pessimistic view to create this cleaner turning point at 146 B.C.E.? By creating a complete break between the pre- and post-146 Republic, Sallust is able to *further* highlight the unprecedented decadence of the socio-historical milieu in which Catiline's character was fostered, and consequently the unprecedented decadence of Catiline himself, to whom he immediately returns in *BC* 14. Indeed, the entire prologue essentially backgrounds Catiline's character, and Sallust, by briefly altering his otherwise pessimistic view of earlier Rome, took the opportunity to enhance his theme and throw Catiline's decadence into greater relief to meet the prologue's immediate aim.